

SHHH..... Stop! Listen! Do you hear what I hear? A collective sigh echoes throughout the land. It is almost 2 months since that famously intractable deadline of May 15th was reached. Our personal fears have been satisfied - temporarily. We all get a few months' reprieve from worrying about Medicare Part D before the November enrollment period arrives. Whether we enrolled in a plan or decided to stand up to the government's threat of a penalty and not join - either way it's out of our hands now. We can return to a life without fear and dread - temporarily.

Many seniors were fortunate enough to be computer- savvy and were able to swim through the sea of Part D plans alone. Others knew someone willing to throw them a life jacket to make swimming against the tide a bit easier. Then there were a few groups of concerned citizens who volunteered to man the lifeboats. Your Cobb County *Senior to Senior* Advocates was one of these groups. We helped approximately 2000 seniors, one-on-one, or in classes, at the Senior Centers and the Central Library for 6 months.

One thing we all learned from the Medicare Part D experience was that our government sees seniors as children who must be threatened with penalties in order to make us do the 'right' thing even though we were offered a 'voluntary' program. I guess the more people who sign up make the statistics look like we all thought this program was the greatest thing since sliced bread. Of course, all seniors want to have quality prescription care and also many seniors who did sign up were happy about their choices because their plan saved them money. They apparently were paying obscene prices and some of these plans (including deductibles and monthly premiums) reduced them to an unconscionable level which is at least going in the right direction. What about those who have never taken prescription drugs? Why should they be penalized because of their personal decision not to join? Is this penalty the government's version of 'time out' for seniors?

Under Medicare Part D, many seniors are better off than they were without a plan and that's a good thing. But being better off is not necessarily being in the best position available. The price of drugs is out of control while the drug companies seem to be creating the need for them. The medical world is calling every malady a 'disease' and the drug companies are right there with a 'cure'. For many, drugs are a godsend - giving relief from severe pain and inability to enjoy life day to day. But for others it might result in symptoms worse than the 'disease'. Once we become a drugged society, our once perfect bodies forget how to respond to normal symptoms of just being 'not well'. Maybe what we feel is only a request by our bodies to let them rest. But since we are impatient to continue our too-busy lives, we ignore our natural cures and plug into the chemicals.

Since so many doctors are prescription- happy, we need to be more vigilant about what goes into our bodies. Just because a drug satisfies our symptoms doesn't mean there may not be another less harsh drug that will do the same thing. Just because we need doctors to help us with our health care doesn't mean we should give up our responsibility to investigate everything that goes into our bodies. We spend a lot of time in the grocery store examining the product labels to see how many calories, how much sugar or salt, what kind of fat etc. but yet will ingest a prescribed chemical with no questions at all. Some folks are taking prescriptions to counteract the symptoms resulting from other prescription medications they are also taking. We know how welcome relief from pain can be but let's not become prescription-dependent unless we really have to.